

# July 2011 Newsletter



Enabling communities  
to help themselves

## Nekemte Visit: April 2011

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April Valerie Huggins and I departed from Heathrow, flying with Ethiopian Airlines to visit Ethiopia again. On arrival at Bole airport, Addis Ababa, despite having four large cases and a great amount of hand baggage, including two laptops, we walked straight through customs with no queries at all, and were met by Qes Alemu. We stayed for two nights at the Taitu Hotel, while we shopped in Addis for books, sports equipment and some resources for the newly established zero grade classes. Whilst there, we were also able to link up with friends including Garedew Derara. On 6<sup>th</sup> April we set off for Nekemte travelling with Qes Alemu in his new car.

Every year I have seen great changes in Nekemte but this year the development was stunning. There were new buildings everywhere and many more in the throes of construction, including several new hotels. Taxis and badaj throng the roads which are now well laid with trees and troughs of flowers in the centre. There are interesting sculptures on the two roundabouts, and there is even a pedestrian crossing. Mark Smith was in Nekemte when we arrived and it was great to have his help and the opportunity to discuss projects. We also caught up with VSOs Frits Los and Emilie and Richard Hayes. Frits has been a wonderful contact over the past year.

A primary focus of Exeter Ethiopia Link Education group recently has been the development of libraries in the Ethiopian schools with which we are involved, and therefore a main objective of our visit this April was to visit all these schools to assess progress and deliver some more books to help swell their small but growing collections.



*The library at Diriba School*

All schools lack resources of any kind, and, until now, if they were able to obtain a few books they were often locked away for fear they may be lost, stolen or spoiled. They cannot be kept in classrooms. Children have no books at home and although there are a few available in shops in the town, no family could afford to spend on books. With no electricity (obviously no television / internet etc) the only way in which children may extend learning or improve their English is through books. One answer is for schools to have a secure, weatherproof room for a library,

with both text books and English readers. It seems that the schools have been persuaded of this vital need. We were delighted to see the commitment that they are now giving to this project. We saw some well furnished and decorated library rooms, with books arranged appropriately on shelves, which in time can be further developed. In the rural schools the students were even allowed to borrow books to take to their homes. Records were carefully kept. This is a first and indeed a great step forward.

Two other areas that we were particularly interested in were the newly established zero grade classes and the provision for children with special educational needs. Although it is expected that schools will include zero grade, there is no training for zero grade teachers or funding from government. Schools have covered a salary for the zero grade teachers in varying ways. Some schools charge families of zero grade pupils, other schools cover the class with a teacher when free from another grade. Sometimes the zero grade class has no teacher for much of the time.



*The Zero Grade class at Sorga School*

We had taken some early years resources for zero grade classes, and through Frits, Valerie was able to hold a workshop for teachers of zero grade and grade 1 to

explain how the resources can be used and how to make use of any local materials. Selamawit Sagni had arranged for us to take a morning session at the Learning Disability Centre. We spent a happy morning introducing circle time activities - songs, music, co-operative activities followed by some experience with finger paints and play-doh. Selamawit has done a wonderful job in establishing this centre. (See article on page 5 - Ed).

During the year 2009/10 Exeter Ethiopia Link supported twelve young women students at the New Generation University College through the generosity of individual sponsors. Five of these students graduated in June 2010. The Dean, Dereje Mulatu, was pleased to report that three of these students are now well employed. The other two, who gained a diploma in nursing, are taking the further qualification now required for nurses. The other seven students are all doing well. Three are now in their third year and should graduate this summer, and four will complete their second year. This year, 2010/11, sponsors have enabled EEL to support seven more young women who will have completed their first year of study by the time this newsletter is published. (How to help? See page 6 - Ed). Sponsors often wish to know whether, by sponsoring a student, they are making a real difference in the life of the girl they are sponsoring. The Dean, Dereje is preparing a paper to compare 'life before' and 'life after' for previous students.

In the second week of our visit we were joined by three teachers from Broadclyst Primary School. Broadclyst's application for a British Council Reciprocal Visit Grant had been successful and they were visiting to spend the next five days at their linked

partner school, Bekumsa Biya Elementary School. The teachers were made extremely welcome by the Director and staff at their partner school. It was obvious that teachers from both schools were deeply committed to this visit.



*The Link Teams at Bekumsa Biya School*

They interacted with obvious empathy, deep interest and respect, both parties eager to learn from the other. We even spotted them working together on a couple of evenings, and they agreed several future joint curricular projects. To date EEL has initiated eight partnership links between schools in Devon and schools in Nekemte town and the surrounding area. At all Ethiopian schools we were welcomed as old friends and it was evident that they value the link with their UK partner schools and are committed to continuing their partnerships.

As always, a special part of our visit is the meeting with our friends in Nekemte. We spent several enjoyable evenings with the VSO volunteers, Frits, Richard and Emilie, and Liz Horsefield. Valerie was invited by Emilie to be guest speaker at Wollega University. We also spent happy evenings with our many Ethiopian friends and Matthew Gichile, who happened to be staying in the same hotel. On several evenings we sampled the great dishes at the new Soona restaurant and were often

accompanied by Tesfaye Wodajo, who is a wonderful and supportive friend. As always our very grateful thanks to Qes Alemu Nega for all that he organised, for without him neither this visit nor our previous visits would have been possible.

Penny Pullen

## **2011 AGM and discussion day**

This event was held on Saturday 14th May at the St. Sidwell's Centre in Exeter. The day started with a presentation on the November 2010 visit to Ethiopia by Rachael Jamieson and Anthea Duquemin, followed by a presentation on the April 2011 visit by Penny Pullen which included a DVD produced by the Broadclyst School teachers who spent a week teaching in their link school as part of an exchange visit funded by the British Council.

The AGM included a report from the chair and the treasurer, election of officers and a discussion on changing the Exeter Ethiopia Link to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Participants also took part in workshops on education, water and the environment, and women's projects, and the day ended with a discussion on adhering to the Charities Commission 'Hallmarks of an Effective Charity'.

Following the AGM, the committee is now:

**Chair:** Mark Howells

**Vice-Chair:** Mark Hodgson

**Treasurer:** Dick Benn

**General Secretary:** Richard King

**Minutes Secretary:** Anthea Duquemin

**Membership Secretary:** Ella Huffman

**Fundraising Coordinator:** Ella Huffman

**Newsletter Editor:** Bruce Hebbard

**Media & Publicity Officer:** unfilled

**Website Editor:** Tom Grainger

**Other Committee Members:** Peter

Grainger, Penny Pullen, Rachael Jamieson,

Cathy Kiddle, Caroline Huxtable, Peter von

Lany, Valerie Huggins.

## Amanda Statham

On May 27<sup>th</sup> 2011, Amanda Statham, one of our committee members passed away very suddenly. Amanda took on the newly created 'media and publicity' officer role in 2010 with a real enthusiasm and helped to promote the link and it's events over the last year. Trustees and members of the committee attended Amanda's funeral at the Exeter and Devon Crematorium. The ceremony was a humanist service that celebrated Amanda's rich and full life and was led by Jenny Lloyd, also a member of the link. A message was written on behalf of the link in a book of remembrance. This is yet another sad loss to our charity and her contributions will be missed but very warmly remembered.

Mark Howells

**Ethiopian Bird Evening:** On May 14<sup>th</sup> the Link held a fundraising event in Broadclyst; 'Birding Ethiopia without trying'. Nigel Birch, a Link member and his wife Rozza recently visited Ethiopia, and recorded the abundant and interesting bird life they came across. The presentation by Nigel was fascinating and as well as birds, included some historical, geological, geographical and social aspects of Ethiopia.



We had some wonderful Ethiopian food, snacks and coffee. Around 45 people came including two Ethiopian students studying at the University and their

wives. £283 profit was made, 50% of which is going towards the new laundry room at the Eye Clinic in Nekemte, which Nigel visited and is interested in supporting. Huge thanks to Nigel for his talk and to Hirut, Peter and Matthew von Lany and everyone who helped or attended.

## Exeter's Active Citizens

### Link with Ethiopia:

A Group of 13 active citizens in Exeter have been involved in a British Council funded project run by Exeter CVS & The Global Centre. Ella Huffman, who volunteers for Exeter-Ethiopia Link was one of those involved. The project 'Locally Engaged, Globally Connected' which was linked with Ethiopia, included five days training covering identity, dialogue, culture and planning social action projects. Ten from the group plus two facilitators visited Bahir Dar in March for ten days, staying with host families and visiting projects and organisations in the area. In May we hosted ten Ethiopian visitors in Exeter, representing different organisations and institutes from across the country.



Exeter-Ethiopia Link joined Active Citizens this year at the Respect Festival on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> June, with a stand publicising our work. We helped to arrange a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony held at the front of the tent on the Sunday to welcome and open The Big Lunch. It attracted a lot of attention and was a really great way to show an Ethiopian tradition. And a big thank you to Eskendrawit and Alemtshai for managing the coffee ceremony itself.

Ella Huffman

## **Fun and Games at the Learning Disability Centre!!**

In August 2010 I was in Nekemte just visiting with a friend Jodie who is a professional scenic artist and is in the process of forming a little NGO Paint Africa. Jodie had just come from painting educational murals for schools in Uganda but wanted to see Ethiopia so I persuaded her to partake in the long bus journey to Nekemte. Bus journeys apart, Nekemte seems to bring people back for various reasons and this was no exception. This time it was Selamwit Sagni who worked with Exeter Ethiopia Link to set up the Learning Disabilities Centre in 2009. She persuaded us that her centre could benefit from an educational mural or 3. So 6 months later in April 2010 we found ourselves on the bus again, then back in Nekemte and armed with local paint financed by the link ready to paint the centre not **for** the children but **with** the children.

The centre has 16 children attending mainly with downs syndrome. Without it they would not be attending school since the local primary school with a special needs unit has declared them too disabled to attend. Two teachers are employed to support them and each day they are brought to and from the centre in a minibus hired for the trip with money from the link.

Preparations had begun the night before when Selam, with the help of 2 of the girls from the School for the Deaf, sewed painting aprons for all the children. Meanwhile Jodie was drawing out African scenes on the wall. Early next day we all met and the painting began. It quickly took surreal proportions as Jodie's animals were quickly covered in green grass by enthusiastic children. It didn't matter.

The pictures were theirs and it became theirs with every child and every teacher enthusiastically taking part. (And new animals had the chance to be painted again).



*Getting stuck into the mural project*

The end product was a day of joy and laughs for all, 3 murals with the main one having a centre piece of a tree made up of all the artist's handprints and above all a reminder of the joy and beauty children with learning disabilities can bring and the potential that they have. And that potential rubbed off. Two days later we met to discuss special needs in Nekemte and already our Ethiopian partners led by Selam were coming up with more schemes and ideas to both support and integrate them. Sometimes a small act like painting a centre can inspire bigger things. Let's hope this is one of those times.

Mark Smith

### **Sponsors now needed for New Generation University students**

The Link is currently seeking sponsors for women commencing their courses in the academic year 2011/12. The cost of sponsoring a student is £180 per year and brings immeasurable benefit to the extended family as well as the student. If you are at all interested please contact Penny Pullen on 01392 274 603.

Date for your Diary:  
**Celebrating Ethiopian New Year:  
Sat 17<sup>th</sup> September, afternoon.**



Please keep this date clear in your diary and join us to celebrate the Ethiopian New Year with traditional events including singing, dance, dress, children's activities and lots more. Further details coming soon via email and on the website (those who receive the newsletter by post who are interested in this event should contact Ella Huffman on 01404 871 372 nearer the time).

This event is being organised by Exeter-Ethiopia Link, Active Citizens Project with input from Ethiopian students studying at the university.

## ***Exeter-Ethiopia Link***

*The Exeter-Ethiopia Link was set up in 1987 to promote a Community Link between Exeter in Devon, England and Hareto in Wollega, Ethiopia. In 1994 the Link included the town of Nekemte.*

*The Link supports: Health, Water, Women's and Educational projects in Hareto and Nekemte and links between schools in Exeter and the communities in Ethiopia.*

**For further information contact:  
Mark Howells (Chair) tel : 01392 202 713  
Email: [mshowells@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:mshowells@blueyonder.co.uk)**

**(for membership)  
Ella Huffman tel : 01404 871 372  
Email: [ellahuffman@lycos.com](mailto:ellahuffman@lycos.com)**

**or view our website:  
[www.exeterethiopiaLink.org](http://www.exeterethiopiaLink.org)**

*Any copy for future newsletters can be sent to the editor, Bruce Hebbard, at Cedar House, Pines Road, Exeter EX2 9EN  
tel: 01392 437 479 or by e-mail to [hebbard@cooptel.net](mailto:hebbard@cooptel.net)*

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